

Margaret Francke

Tape #132

Interviewed in 1985 by two women who are not identified

Transcribed by Kathleen Irving, April 20, 2001

Woman: Just tell us right from the heart.

Margaret Francke (Margaret): I just happened to drop in here and remembered how depressed I am to watch the building of the new jail. The park was one of the most beautiful sights, I think, in the state of Utah, and out here between two deserts we certainly needed it. All down through the years tourists have written back to local people or the *Vernal Express* and expressed their love for the lunch that they ate under the beautiful trees. Vernal had the only linden tree in the state of Utah. The hardwood trees that were planted diagonally through the courthouse lot, they came up to the old courthouse and then they went on up to First East. Those were planted by the Current Topics Club way back, soon after my mother came here. I don't remember. She came here in 1906. Those trees had grown so beautifully and there was a row of cottonwoods, or, I don't know what they were, that went through the center of the park. You girls are old enough to remember a little bit about the park.

Woman: They were there when I came.

Margaret: But anyway, it seemed like the county didn't want the responsibility of the park. They talked about building a new courthouse and everybody opposed it and said, "No, you've got other land. You've got more land than anybody can imagine. Places that would be so satisfactory for a courthouse." Heavens, even up where the city office was would have been better than build it down here.

Well, that didn't work. They finally built it. Well, then they decided that they'd give.... And I don't know how all these things came about, the initial planning. But one of the first things that I felt badly about was giving half of our land to the state of Utah to build the museum, the Field House. But they did. Of course, we all got excited about it, to be a museum and everything.

Some time later, Charlie Neal [Margaret's father] was always hanging around the courthouse; he was always sticking his nose in the records. He didn't like a lot of things that were being done, but one man... Of course, that street over there, across the street from the park, had people on it that thought they were powerful. They had Dr. Hansen on the corner, and Dr. Shimmin, well-known, prominent person, Charlie Neal, Dr. Francke, on down to Bry Stringham, Blaine Lee. We thought we had quite a notable group on our side of town.

Well, we complained and we worried about things, but anyway, Dad found that they had only given half of their land away. Everybody got furious! Why dump that on us now? What will we do with that land? So they scurried around and they had that little playground down there, which was nice for a town this size, earlier. So they finally.... I don't know whether they talked to Dr. Christie or whether they let it be known that they had some land that they'd like to see used. So then Dr. Christie came up with the idea of a scout house for the Kiwanis. They needed a place to meet for their scouts and

everything and the other scout house had been done away with and there really wasn't an adequate place. So, they built the scout house. It looked a little out of place down there, but we grew used to it. As time went on we wondered many, many times, "How did we get along without it?"

Well, from that, of course, we built the rose garden in memory of the servicemen. And that was a beautiful sight.

Woman: Was that before the swimming pool?

Margaret: No, I expect it wasn't. I get kind of mixed up. I'm coming up to that. But anyway, the pine trees were planted. Well, then they decided that we had to have the swimming pool, that Vernal had to have a swimming pool. And that was the site that the Jaycees picked out. Bry Stringham begged them not to come to the park, not to come to the center of town, and offered to give them land down below Second North. No, they wouldn't have any part of it. It became a kind of a battle between the people of the town and the young men, and it was quite sad. At least we had the meetings that we all got to go to and express our opinion and that's more than we're having nowadays.

Then people said to me, "Why do you care so about the swimming pool, with all of your kids?" And I said, "My kids would find the swimming pool if it was in Lapoint!"

Then they wanted to put it up by the Episcopal church where Voorhies had some property. They wouldn't have it. They didn't want their neighborhood spoiled by a swimming pool, and I think they were planning on building their motel about that time. So, the Jaycees, one day, they'd made up their mind that's what they were going to do, so they came down here at noon and just pulled out all these trees. There they lay for two solid years. Kids had a hey day playing on all those old stumps. The pictures that we took made them look like I lived on a palatial estate. The weeds were higher than the tree trunks!

Well, the swimming pool ground was finally broken, I think, either in '47 or '49. I had that paper laid out the other day, and they started to build. But first, the bulldozers made the big hole and that got covered up with snow. That must have been in the fall. That was the first year that we had any skiing talked about or done about out here. We all sent to the Army surplus and got pretty white skis and the white parkas, all the things, for our kids. Claudius Banks opened the ski run out on the dinosaur hills. So we had lots of things to distract us, but I never quit brooding over the giving another piece of ground away. We needed to keep the park. It was sad to just watch it fade away and go farther.

The playground has not been cared for for many, many years, and yet it's all we've had until the private citizens and clubs have taken it upon themselves in the last two or three years, I guess, I really don't know, to put the playground equipment up in, I think they're memorials, aren't they, on both sides of town?

Woman: No, the one...

Margaret: One is up here, Woody Searle's. And they are lovely, but you go up there and you go to a gathering and it's under the pavilion and you look at those little trees and you think that in fifty years those will be nice parks. But they won't sustain us for now. When you come to the dinners that the Rotary Club has to raise money for the Dinosaur Gardens, or the Chamber of Commerce, I don't know which does that, I've forgotten, they have one big tree for shade and it's out in front of the courthouse

now, because we don't even have the big stretch of lawn back here that we had for a while.

Then they were going to build the new courthouse. Well, to begin with, we resented that because they had told us when they built the other courthouse that they would go on up, that they wouldn't take any more land. And *then*, I went to the meeting and heard about the jail. I understood it was only going to be one floor, and I thought that they said they would have plenty of ground for activities for the prisoners, you know, fenced. It was very glamorous.

Well, now it's there. The City of Vernal, I don't think, even has any idea what is going on over here on First North. The park has gone. There isn't even a postage stamp left. Not that our library isn't one of the finest. Our Field House is recognized world over. The courthouse: they talk about its beautiful architecture, which, I'm sorry, I don't think I understand architecture. Bry Stringham and his wife and I came over here and we went around up in the courthouse and we finally decided that maybe we ought to try the elevator. So we did, then we went back up and walked out the front door. All this talk had come up about building the new courthouse and everything and how short they are for parking.

Woman: That's what I thought the first day when I read it in the paper. I said, there's not enough parking for us now, much less another big building.

Margaret: Then they brought the State in and, I'm sorry, but they felt the need of bringing the State in on account of the financial part of it because we have more big industrial stuff coming into our end of the world than I think people realize. It used to be only the Gilsonite that really was a big contributor. I remember when my dad used to pay the taxes. How happy they were to see him, when he was still operating the Gilsonite mine. But it's now become a very depressing situation. Anyone that lives over here can't help but feel it. So, that's why I've been so blue today. I've had a ball watching Bob Jones' fabulous material and machinery work. Goodness gracious, it's no wonder they can build things so fast.

Woman: I wondered what they were going to do with that and they lifted it up and put them on top.

Margaret: I came over and saw all these steel, well, they looked like cabinets or rooms or something. They're already built, ready to take up there and put side by side and bolt them together, I guess. It's fabulous. Now there's two, they've got parking lots on beyond the jail. But the saddest thing of all is that the community went to *so* much trouble and *so* much expense, I think each one of them hoping their contribution helped to make the Dinosaur Garden.

Woman: It's too small.

Margaret: It's too small. They have no place to expand. It's locked in there. Just squished. When my daughter worked at the Field House last summer, people would come and they'd say, "My word, what is that big brick wall over there?" It looks like a concentration camp and it is.

Woman: What I'm worried about is where they are going to do their exercises and stuff.

Margaret: A little square room right in there. I went through it the other day.

Woman: Is it opened up to...?

Margaret: No, nobody told me I could. I don't ask permission anymore, the way they push me.

Woman: Is the center opened to the sky or is it just all inside?

Margaret: I would think that it is and I think these two ? they put up today, one may be on one side and one on the other, I don't know. I think they're going up with another story now. That's what it sounded like in the paper the other day. But I told the sheriff one day, I said, "You know, you're going to have to let those boys have a key to that front door." There isn't that much steel and concrete and brick in anything in the world as there is over there.

Woman: How many beds? 120?

Margaret: 160. I had my twelve-year-old grandson with me, and he said, "And that's what a jail looks like?" And I said, "Now remember that all your life."

Woman: Oh, he went in with you?

Margaret: Oh, we just went by the front door. But the next day I noticed they had put the sign over the door. "Do Not Come In." But I decided not to rent a room because there's slabs about that deep and there's just that slab and whatever else they are going to put in.

Woman: So, they're not very big, I guess?

Margaret: They'll probably be concrete. I think some of the prisoners they've got out at the state, they're bringing out. But, I'll never need to be afraid.

Woman: How will they get them out in the yard?

Margaret: There'll be no more of that and there'll be big steel gates that open automatically, I heard the sheriff tell this at the meeting, so they can drive in with their prisoners. Then, I guess, there's a tunnel so they can bring them to the courthouse.

Woman: Why would they bring them to the courthouse? For trial?

Margaret: I came and watched them dig the foundation and I swear I don't think it's deep enough for that big building.

Woman: Maybe they dug it out under the road or something, but all winter long we've been in and out of here and I've never seen that open down.

Margaret: Oh, well, honey, they did all of that before they ever started to build this. They were in here

with building equipment and I think they had an awful time taking out the concrete of the old jail. Somebody said, "What are you fussing about? You've lived behind the jail all your life." And I said, "Yes, but I had a little greenery to look at." It's kind of sad. But I hate it for our town that has the reputation this one does. Because it is the one part of town where we have spent thousands and thousands of dollars to attract the tourists to stop. The tourists have no place to park. Instead of parking up Main Street, they come around. They parked across the street, they had that one black-topped area. Then they had to come out of there, go down the street, through the alley, into the museum and pay a fee, come clear back to where they left their car and can't get out the gate, so then they go back. I think that's a bit of an imposition. Should have been more careful in our planning and if they were going to continue to have those kinds of things, been able to have swayed our county commissioners. We had such a good piece of land right down there at the fairgrounds and they're talking every day about moving the fairgrounds. The courthouse could have been made to be a beautiful sight down there, just two blocks from where it is now. It could have faced Main Street.

Woman: That would have given that area of town a lift, too.

Margaret: Yes, it would have been an entirely different situation. They could have put the racetrack out north of town where they have other ground. I think their planning was very unfortunate, and their stubbornness.

Woman: And about the hospital, right after we got this one built, I went out to be with one of my daughters. She had her baby in Logan. So you drive out of town about 8 blocks and here they have this lovely hospital and they have this huge lawn, just oodles of parking and it was so quiet and peaceful. I thought we'd really made a mistake.

Margaret: With both of our hospitals. Neither one was right. If we were a poor county and didn't have the land, I think it would be such an entirely different setting. Then to have made such blunders on the building of the hospital. I think that was sad. Now our high school out there where they spent millions, I guess, moving the earth, and bringing in new to build it on and we don't even need it, they tell me. I don't know when we're going to have that other boom.

Woman: I think we'll need it. In fact, next year we still have to have the schools double session.

Margaret: Well, that's just because they're not moving, isn't it? When they get moved.... It's the Jr. High that's the crowded group.

Woman: Well, when they get the other one finished, they'll move the students over. Then they'll have room. They won't be short, the way it is right now. I think we do need the new school.

Margaret: Oh, well, we'll grow into it, that a cinch.

Woman: At least it's out of town.

Margaret: If they'd have tried to squeeze that in to the....

Woman: There would have been too much in one area. I appreciate you telling me that now. You see, you've got it all said there.

Margaret: I don't know whether I've told straight or not. If you ever play it for anybody, they'll say it wasn't the way it was at all.

[Pause in tape. When it begins again, Margaret is in the middle of a sentence.]

Margaret: there and I had my back to them. They were just a-ripping my writing that I had put in the *Vernal Express* into shreds about some incident, I can't even remember now, but it was clear back in the beginning. I was born by then, I guess, but I wasn't an authority. So, I got up and turned around and walked over to them. I'd been good friends with both of them all my life and they just froze. I said, "If there's anything that I'm not telling right on that, I want both of you to write it down and give it to me and when we celebrate our 75th, I'll see that it's corrected. We forgot to celebrate our 75th. But they didn't write anything for me, either.

Woman: You didn't change anything! That was Mother Adams and...

Margaret: Yes, and Mrs. White. Mrs. Adams was an Episcopalian and her sister named the church and all of those things. They played such a role in our many long years of survival. Mrs. White was, too. But in the early days there was such a whole other book.

Woman: We'll get that one another time. What year was that in the paper, so I can hunt for it? You said your history was in the paper.

Margaret: Oh, it would have been '61, was our big celebration. We had all the priests from any place in Utah and our bishop and the bishop of Colorado. Liz Cassen (?) was here, you knew her didn't you?

Women: Yes.

Margaret: She spearheaded it and we had a big tea and open house over at the Hotel Vernal. It went on for a couple of days. It was a big celebration. So many of our native people were flying back and forth all the time. I guess they had a lot of fun teasing the hostesses about how safe did they feel with all of those priests.

Woman: Do you remember a reverend, I think he was in the Episcopal church, by the name of Twill?

Margaret: Oh, yes.

Woman: Tell me about everything you can remember, because his daughters, or grand-daughters, came here just a couple years ago. No, it was just last year, I guess, and they wanted to find a history about

him.

Margaret: Well, he sent us all the material, honey, and I can look that up in our scrapbook. It would be better to have it. He was going on the week-long trips out to Watson and Dragon and he'd go by train.

Woman: Did he live in Vernal?

Margaret: Yes, he lived in Vernal.

Woman: And he went all around to the different little towns?

Margaret: It was funny, but I was thinking that those girls brought that stuff to my dad. But Reverend Twill must have sent a million letters. I corresponded with him for a long time, so we have a letter or two that's in there.

Woman: Maybe we can take a picture of it and send it to the girls. Even if he wrote it, they'd love to have it. They wouldn't have a copy of what he wrote, probably.

Margaret: They'd be tickled to death. We invited him to come. But see, the church was opened in 1901 and it was quite an interesting history. I'm sure I could get that book from Iva Cutshaw and bring it down and let you skim through it.

Woman: You said you went to Primary once in that little white stake house...

Margaret: The church, on Main Street. I was in the class with Ralph Siddoway and George Davis and the Eaton girls.

Woman: What I was wondering about that was, that wasn't the original schoolhouse, was it? There was a schoolhouse somewhere in that block.

Margaret: No, it wasn't in that block. It was across the street from the post office. We bought, and Dad redid the house, then in 1918 we sold it to McClellans and left here. Dad got us moved to Colorado Springs and came back to pick up his check and bought an automobile with it.

Woman: Did you live in the McClellan home?

Margaret: Oh, yes.

Woman: So, Charlie Neal bought it, then your dad, and sold it to McClellans. It says in this history I have here that that was the second schoolhouse, that at one time in the fort, when they had the fort there, it was the second year they were in the fort, or even while they actually all got there, I think, they wanted to get rid of the kids, so they built the schoolhouse. Out in the back, see. That one must have been torn down, if it wasn't the same building that ended up being the

church.

Margaret: That First Ward meetinghouse served the purpose for everything that went on. Now, we lived on that side of town all our lives. I grew up in the McNaughton house or the McClellan's. They've all got the names that they fell to later, not ours.

Woman: So the McNaughton house was the one behind Skaggs?

Margaret: Yes. And that was facing Main Street and that was one of the lovely homes in Vernal. My dad was working for Mr. Reed, who was building wells out in, I don't know whether it was Dog Valley or someplace else in the Twists, out beyond, over there. Beulah Bondy and her mother were here and they lived at Hendersons. My mother had this formal dinner every night. She had a couple of maids and Mr. Reed had room there at the house and we lived there. But it was fancy living and we moved from that house. After Mr. Reed left the country, we moved from there down to the McClellan house. I think they just did one room of the house at a time. I can remember that we were sent to Green River to Grandma's home that summer that they were redoing it. That was in behind the Red Front Garage.

Woman: Where did your dad live when he passed away?

Margaret: He was in the home over at Roosevelt. He was one of the trees we didn't transplant that year. When they closed this home down here they just said, "Go!" and we all had to leave in a month. I was in Louisiana and I had to come home and move him the next day. They just died like flies over there. Don't think any of them knew what happened to them. But all that tender loving care that they were getting down here didn't move with them, and they just all faded away.

Woman: I'm glad we have a nice place now.

Margaret: Oh, yes. I haven't been over there. I've spent so much of my life in a hospital room and a nursing home that I've lost my nerve. I'm going someday, though.

Woman: It's been very interesting. I think we could spend several more hours.

End of tape.